DARK HORSE MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
104
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HIROAKI SAMURA
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Itto-*ryū* seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU
The leader of the Itto-*ryū* sword school, targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful, manipulative Mugai-*ryū* leader and *bangashira*, serving the Shogun

HYAKURIN
Assassin for the shadowy Mugai-*ryū*

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Habaki Kagimura orchestrates a surprise attack at a lavish banquet that decimates a batch of new Itto-*ryu* recruits. With ten core followers still alive, Anotsu rallies his surviving warriors together to dish out vengeance and rededicate themselves to his ideals. After sparring with Gichi, Manji agrees to meet with the mysterious Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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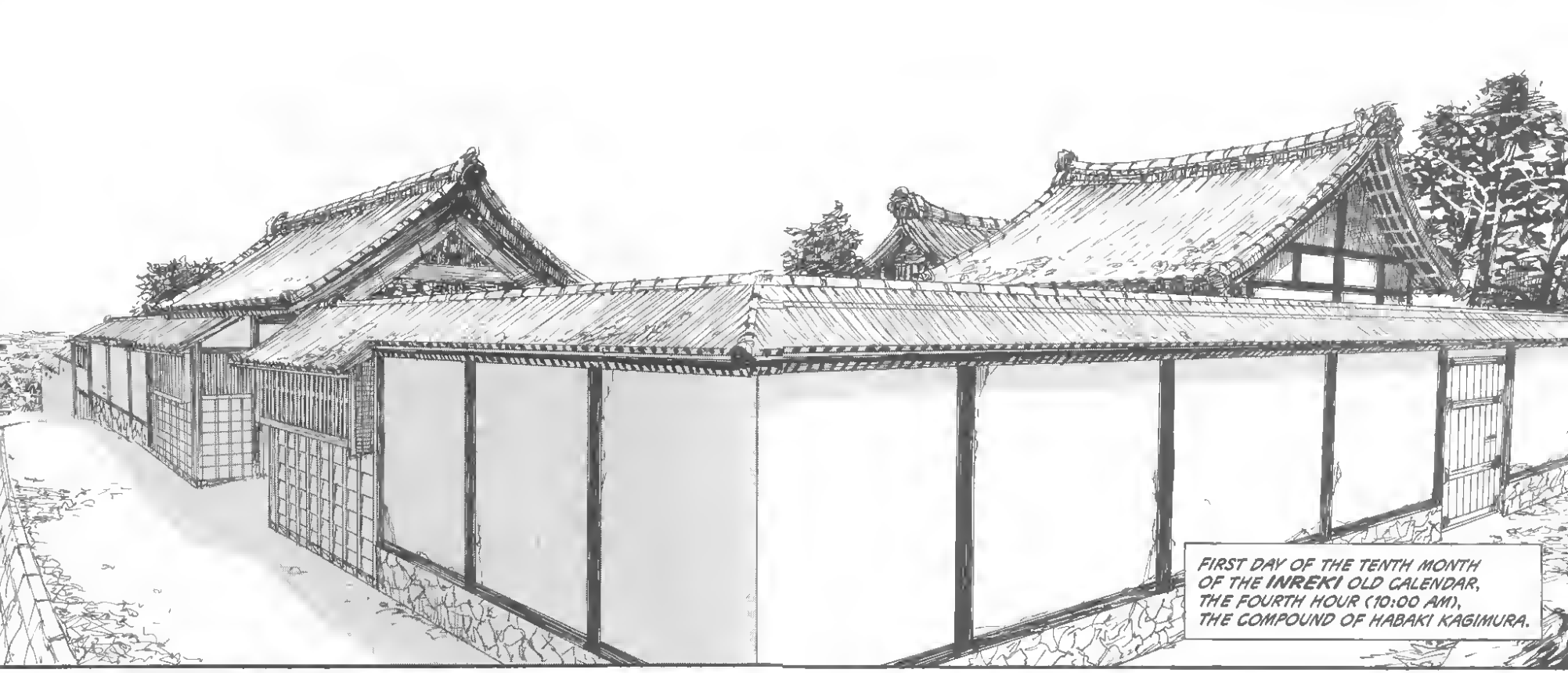
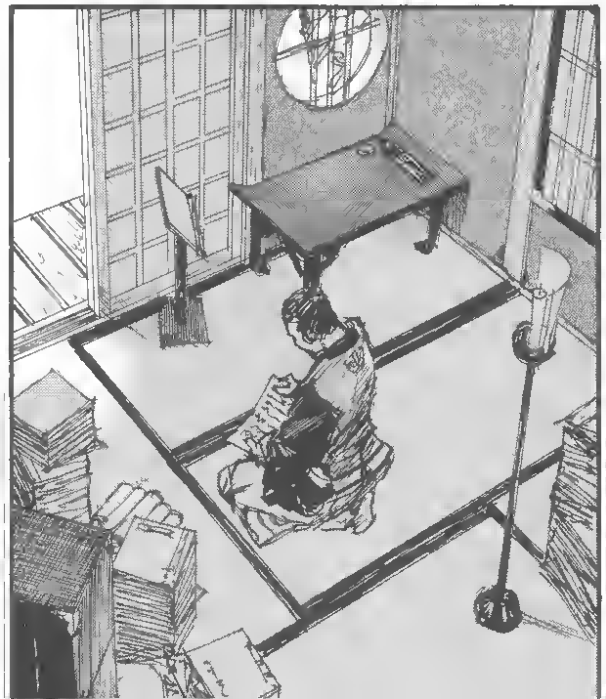
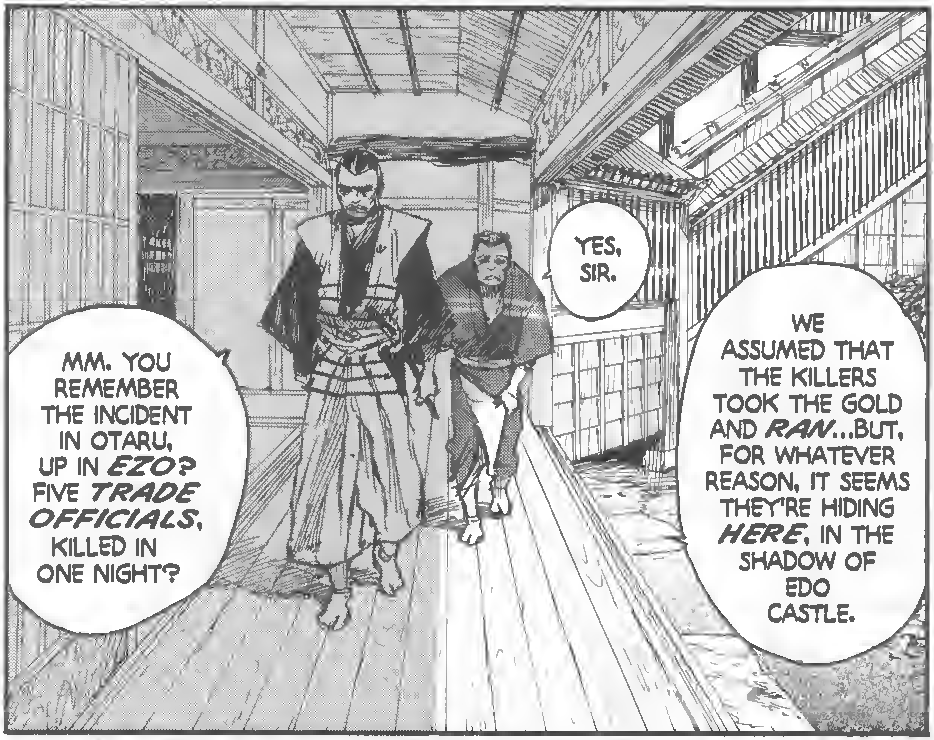
無限の住人

FORSAKEN

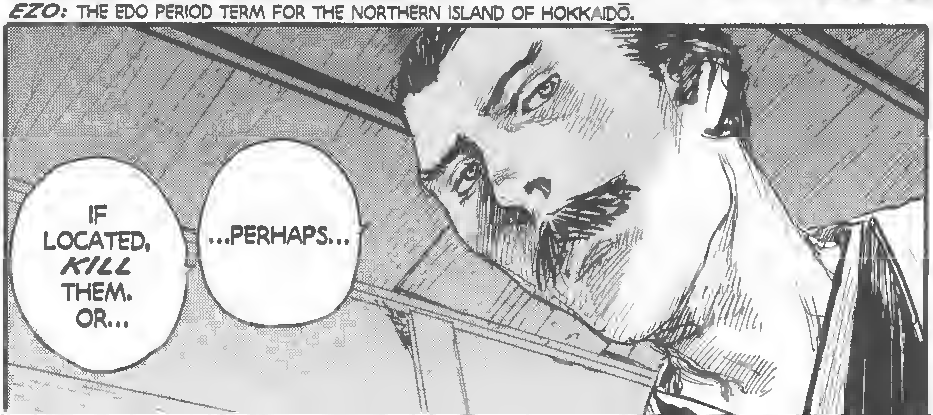

FIRST DAY OF THE TENTH MONTH
OF THE INREKI OLD CALENDAR,
THE FOURTH HOUR (10:00 AM),
THE COMPOUND OF HABAKI KAGIMURA.



MASTER... THAT MAN IS HERE.

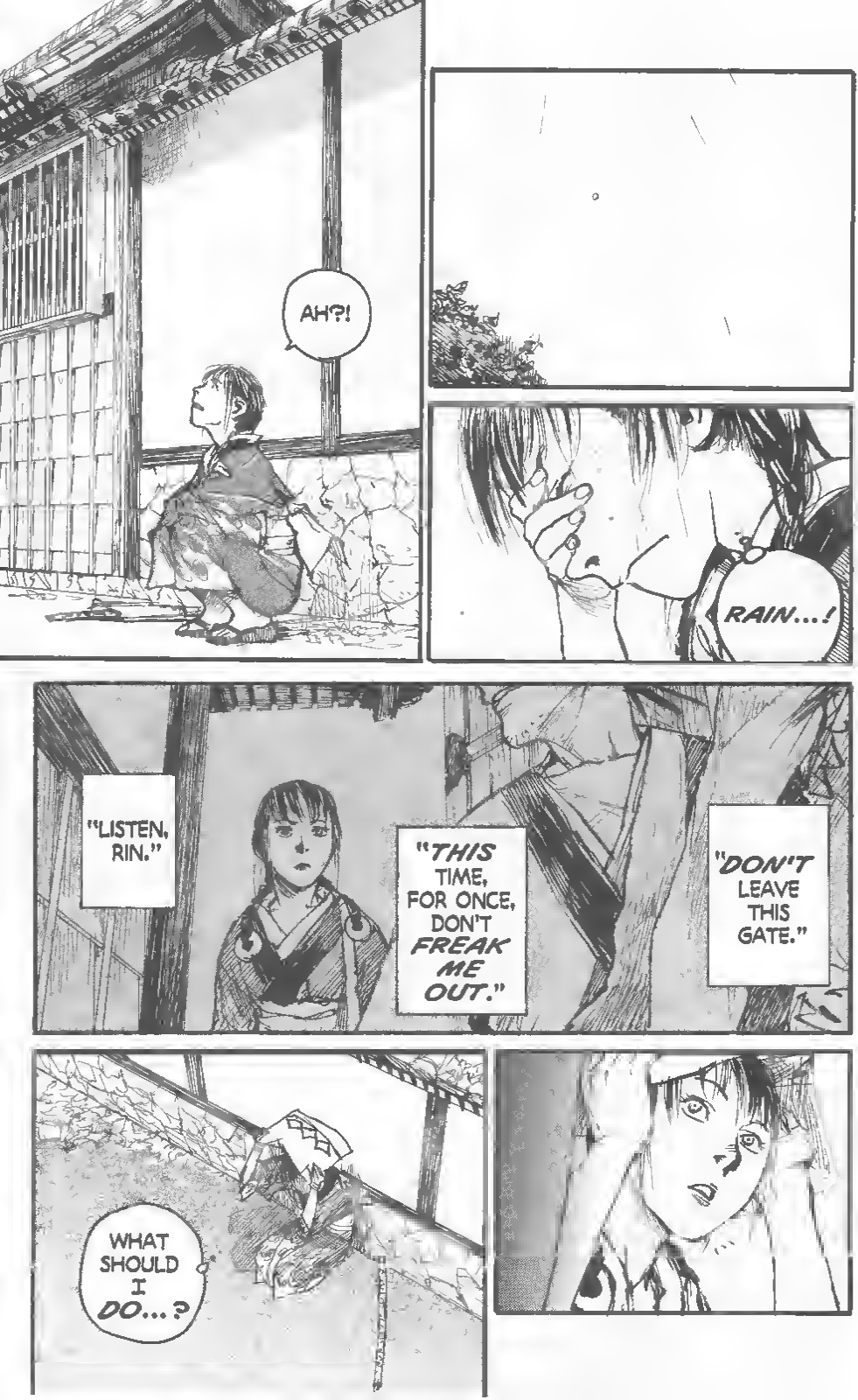

MM. YOU REMEMBER THE INCIDENT IN OTARU, UP IN *EZO*? FIVE *TRADE OFFICIALS*, KILLED IN ONE NIGHT?
YES, SIR.
WE ASSUMED THAT THE KILLERS TOOK THE GOLD AND *RAN*...BUT, FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT SEEMS THEY'RE HIDING *HERE*, IN THE SHADOW OF EDO CASTLE.

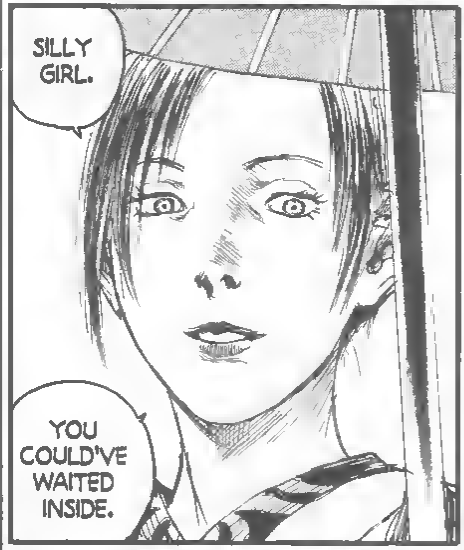
EZO: THE EDO PERIOD TERM FOR THE NORTHERN ISLAND OF HOKKAIDŌ.



.....
.....
MUGAI-RYŪ AGAIN, SIR?
MUGAI-RYŪ.
ITTŌ-RYŪ.
?
NOW THIS MAN I'M ABOUT TO MEET...
WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU ALL RESISTING?
A TIME OF PEACE?
OUR SWORDS AND OUR CANON...
...SHRIVEL-ING AWAY.
IT'S INESCAP-ABLE.

BUT IF IT MUST BE SO...
...SURELY YOU COULD FADE AWAY WITHOUT THE PAIN?
YOU'RE TRAGIC, ALL OF YOU.
SO TRAGIC.
I ENVY YOU.

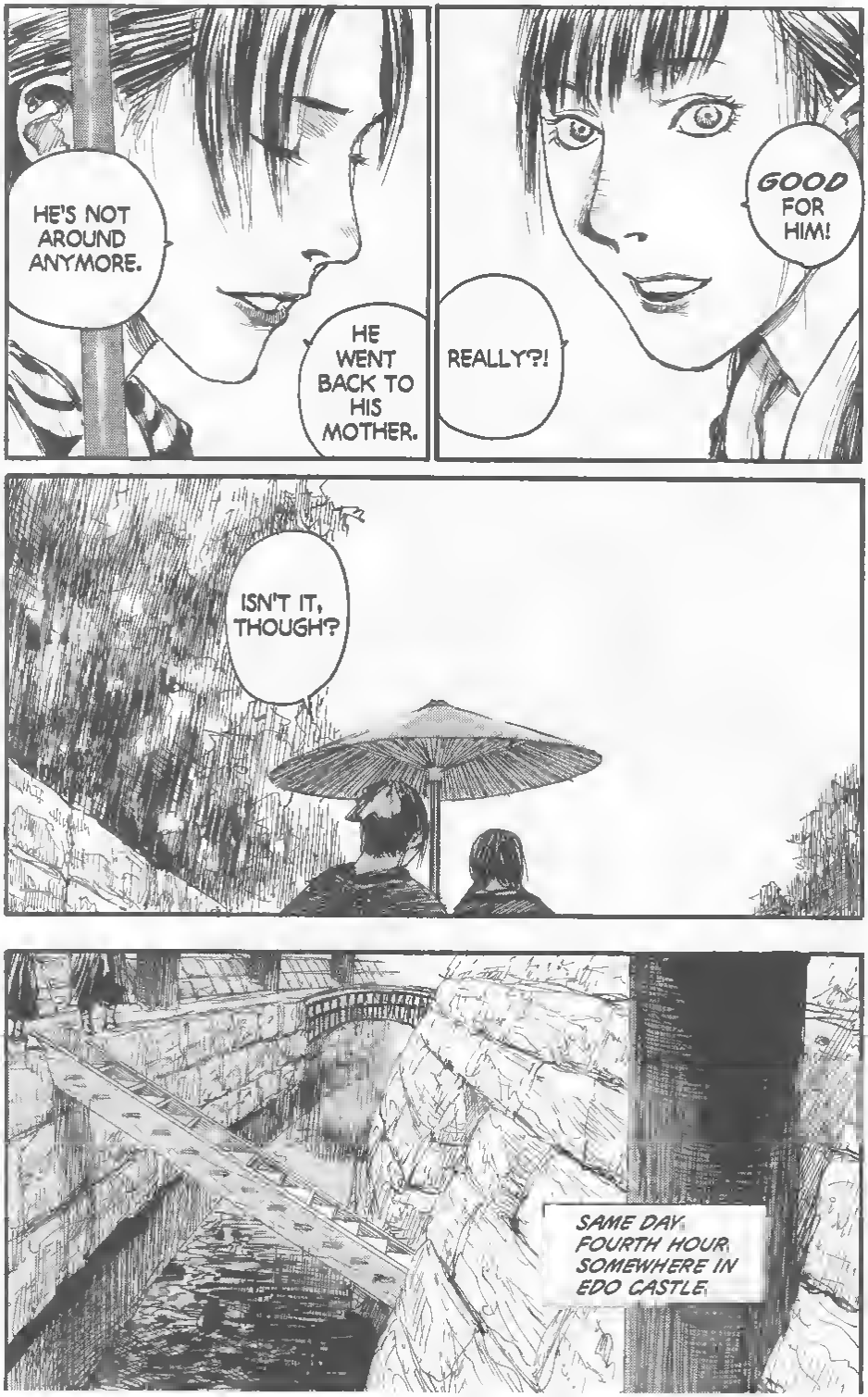

AH?!
RAIN...!
"LISTEN, RIN."
"THIS TIME, FOR ONCE, DON'T FREAK ME OUT."
"DON'T LEAVE THIS GATE."
WHAT SHOULD I DO...?

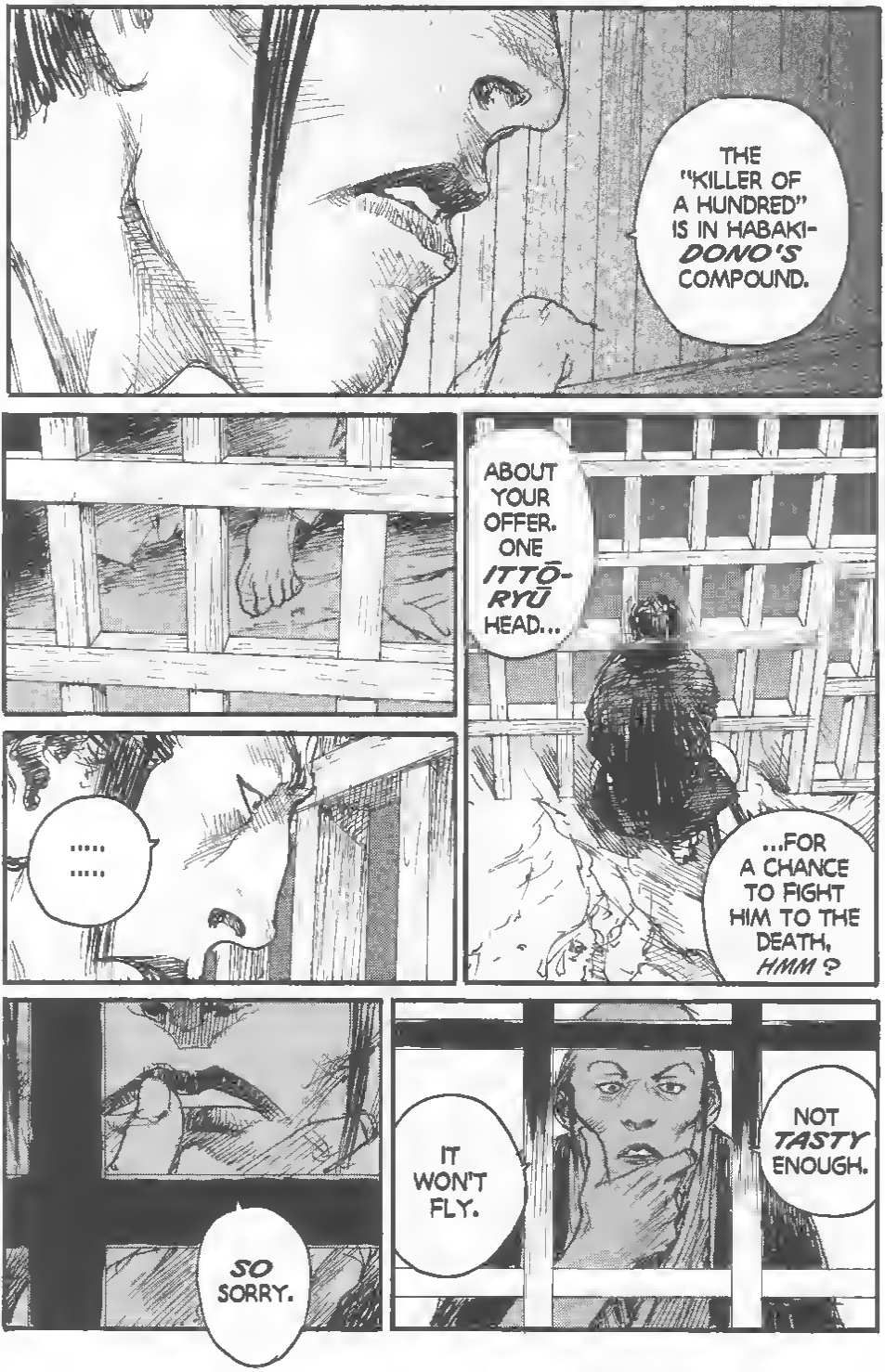

SILLY GIRL.
YOU COULD'VE WAITED INSIDE.

HY... HYAKU-RIN...?

BUT MANJI...
HE SAID GOD KNOWS WHAT'D GO DOWN... TO WAIT OUTSIDE--
HAH! DON'T BE A WORRY-WART!

I MEAN, IT'S RAIN-ING...
SAY... WANNA GET SOME SWEETS?
OH... YES!
GOSH. I GUESS I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THE BATH HOUSE.
YOU KNOW, YOU LOOK... HOW TO PUT IT? STALWART, RIN.
Y-YOU THINK SO? I LOST SOME WEIGHT...
AH! THAT'S IT! YOU'RE THINNER. SKINNY!
HYAKURIN, YOUR ARM?
OH. SPRAINED IT.
ARE YOU STILL WITH THAT GUY?
WHAT'S HIS NAME. UHM...
SHINRIJI! HIM?


HE'S NOT AROUND ANYMORE.
HE WENT BACK TO HIS MOTHER.
REALLY?!
GOOD FOR HIM!
ISN'T IT, THOUGH?
SAME DAY, FOURTH HOUR, SOMEWHERE IN EDO CASTLE


THE "KILLER OF A HUNDRED" IS IN HABAKI-DONO'S COMPOUND.
ABOUT YOUR OFFER. ONE ITTŌ-RYŪ HEAD...
...FOR A CHANCE TO FIGHT HIM TO THE DEATH, HMM?
.....
.....
IT WON'T FLY.
NOT TASTY ENOUGH.
SO SORRY.

FOUR HEADS.
THE ONE YOU WANT, MAGATSU TAITO...
...AND AT LEAST THREE MORE.
FURTHER-MORE...
...WE DECIDE THE ORDER.
FIRST, THE ADDITIONAL THREE.
AND FINALLY...
THEN MAGATSU.
...MISTER ONE-HUNDRED.
A WORD TO THE WISE!
GO CRAZY WITH HATE, SWITCH THE ORDER...

...AND THE METSUKE'S MEN WILL KILL YOU ON THE SPOT.
OF COURSE, THIS IS OUR WAY OF MAKING SURE YOU DON'T SKIP OFF HALF DONE.
THINK ABOUT IT!
JUST FOUR!
DO FOUR ITTŌ-RYŪ AND YOU'RE FREE AS A LITTLE BIRDY...
...TO DIE IN A DITCH, TO FIND A JOB AND GO STRAIGHT.
YOUR CHOICE.
TOO GOOD TO TURN DOWN, NO?

HEH... HEH, HEH...
...FOUR... FUCKERS...

JUST... FOUR, YOU SAY?
PAL, YOU MAY NOT KNOW IT, BUT...
...I'VE ALREADY WHACKED...
...THIRTY ITTŌ-RYŪ GUYS. AT LEAST.
THAT WAS WHEN YOU HAD HANDS!
FRANKLY, WE DON'T EXPECT MUCH FROM YOU.

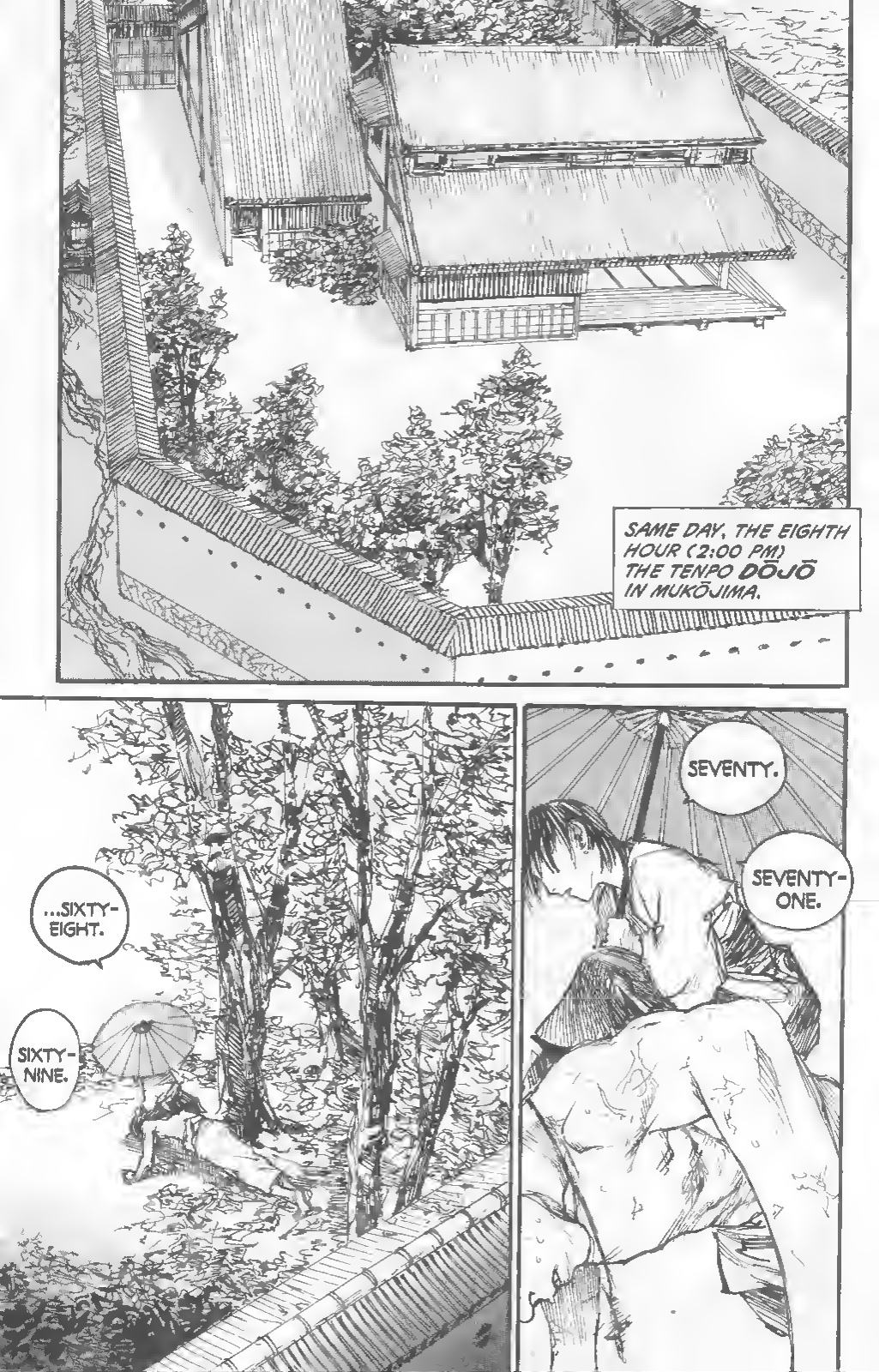
THE ONLY REASON WE HARBOR A WRECK LIKE YOU, IS BECAUSE HABAKI-DONO SAID TO.
EVEN A MAD DOG, A CORNERED RAT, IF PUSHED...
...HAS CRAZY STRENGTH. OR SO SAYS HE.
BUT, IF YOU QUERY ME...
...I'D SAY IT'S BETTER FOR THE WORLD...
...IF A LOATHE-SOME FREAK GETS KILLED BY ITS OWN PREY!
AFTER I... WENT DOWN THE FALLS...
...I... LOST... MY LEFT EYE.
IN IT'S PLACE...
...THERE'S A NEW WEAPON...
A WEAPON...?!
CAN'T... TELL YOU.
HOH! ONE CAN HARDLY WAIT!
BUT, AS FOR NOW...

...HAVE YOU CHOSEN?
THOSE "HANDS" I BROUGHT YOU?
.....
.....
A SINGLE MAN...
IT AIN'T EASY... BEING HANDS.
EVEN FOR ONE GUY.
FEEDING...
...CLEANING WEAPONS...
...AND SHIT.
NOT TO MENTION...
...KEEPIN' THAT PART HAPPY.

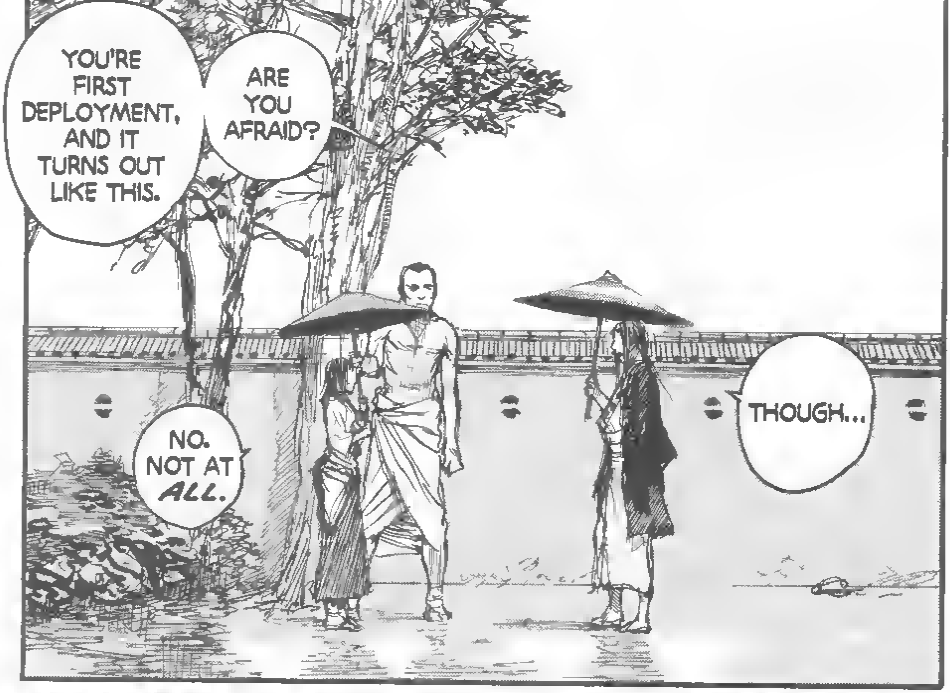
I TRIED THAT OUT...
...FOR ALL O' LAST NIGHT.
SKSSH
THIS MORNING...I DECIDED.
...?!

BUT THE BOY'S STILL BREATHIN'...
THE *HO* CROAKED.

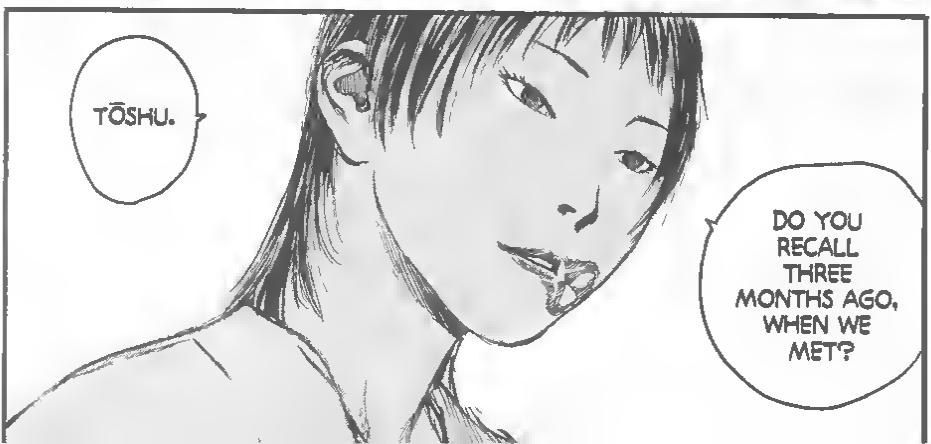
FROM NOW ON, *HE'S* MY HANDS.


SAME DAY, THE EIGHTH HOUR (2:00 PM)
THE TENPO DŌJŌ IN MUKŌJIMA.
...SIXTY-EIGHT.
SIXTY-NINE.
SEVENTY.
SEVENTY-ONE.

ISAKU.
DŌA.
HARD WORK ON A RAINY DAY.
OH! TŌSHU?!
HOW IS YOUR HEALTH...?!
THREE MONTHS ALREADY?
HOW LONG SINCE YOU CAME TO THE ITTŌ-RYŪ?

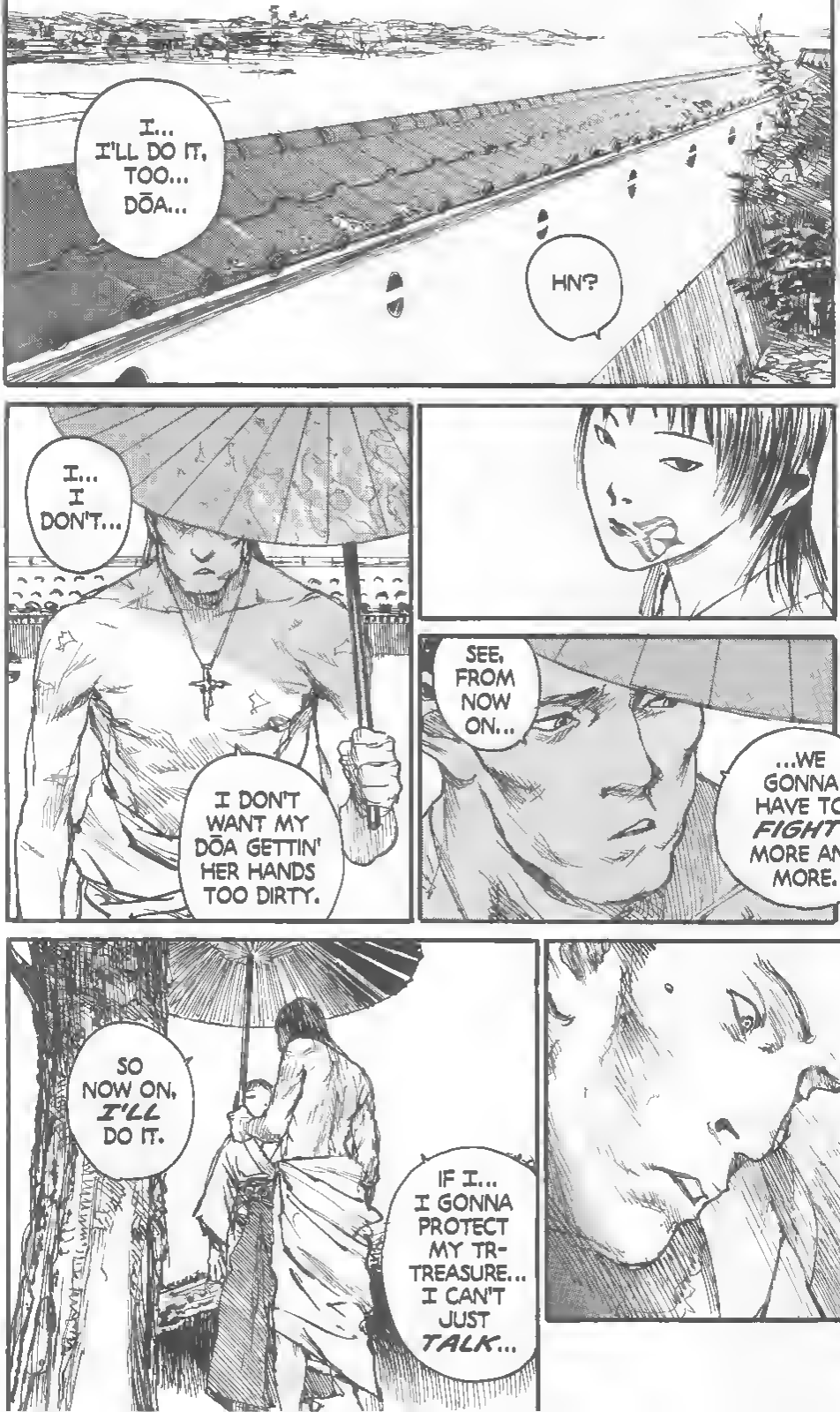

YOU'RE FIRST DEPLOYMENT, AND IT TURNS OUT LIKE THIS.
ARE YOU AFRAID?
NO. NOT AT ALL.
THOUGH...

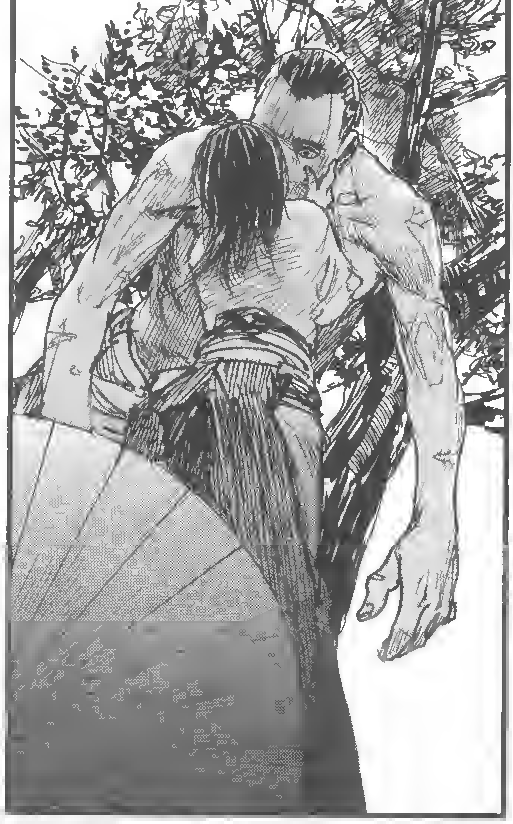
...I WON'T BLAME YOU IF YOU CHOOSE TO RUN.


TŌSHU.
DO YOU RECALL THREE MONTHS AGO, WHEN WE MET?

TRAVEL-ING WITH ISAKU... THIS GIRL, HUMAN TRASH...
...CASUALLY HURTING ANYONE IN HER PATH?
BY MEETING YOU, KOCKING ON THIS GATE...
...I'VE LEARNED SO MUCH.
VIOLENCE, WHEN YOUR HEART HAS A PLACE... OR DOES NOT.
SUCH REASSUR-ANCE.
YOUR WORDS, YOUR IDEALS.
THIS LAND MAY BE TOO PEACEFUL FOR SUCH DREAMS...
...BUT IN FIFTY, A HUNDRED YEARS...
...I KNOW IT WILL CHANGE PEOPLES' HEARTS. UNTIL THAT TIME...
...I THINK I'LL OFFER MY LIFE TO KEEPING OUR PLACE ALIVE.

THE BATTLE WILL BE LONG.
WE MUST *RESIST*. *FIGHT*. UNTIL THE *BAKUFU* AGAIN UNDERSTANDS THE NEED FOR TRUE MILITARY POWER.
I HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY OF US WILL BE LEFT WHEN WE REACH OUR GOAL.
BUT WHEN CORNERED OR TRAPPED, *REMEMBER*...
...DON'T RESPECT *DEATH*. CHOOSE *LIFE*, EVEN IF YOU FLEE.
PROMISE ME THAT.
...YES, SIR.


I... I'LL DO IT, TOO... DŌA...
HN?
I... I DON'T...
I DON'T WANT MY DŌA GETTIN' HER HANDS TOO DIRTY.
SEE, FROM NOW ON...
...WE GONNA HAVE TO FIGHT. MORE AN' MORE.
SO NOW ON, I'LL DO IT.
IF I... I GONNA PROTECT MY TR- TREASURE... I CAN'T JUST TALK...



IT'S OKAY.

...THAT'S BEEN MY JOB.
SINCE THE NIGHT I GOT FIVE IN OTARU...

WE HAVE OUR GODS ON OUR SIDE.
I WON'T LOSE, ISAKU.
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
Duet

The feud between the Ittō-*ryū* and the Mugai-*ryū* heats up as Anotsu sets a new plan of attack in motion. Manji meets with Habaki Kagimura, the shifty leader of the Mugai-*ryū*, and they sit to discuss 100 deaths, immortality, and tea. The next tense installment of Hiroaki Samura's Eagle and Eisner Award-winning epic promises plenty of suspense and surprises!

GLOSSARY

Bakufu: The central government and bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa Shogunate. Originally established in Edo by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship

Ezo: The Edo Period term for the northern island of Hokkaido

Go-Rōjū: Senior councilors to the Shogun, picked from the most trusted daimyo (feudal lords)

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal

Kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.

Metsuke: A post combining the function of chief of police and head of intelligence

Mugai-ryū: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets

Ryū: A sword school

Tāshū: Leader; master

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork. The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue. Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

Manji and Rin!
Pinup by Michael Dixon, London, Ontario, Canada

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BIG BLUE

SCAN

2005